

## **Student Evaluation of Instruction**

### **Appropriate use of Results**

#### **Background:**

Student Evaluation of Instruction (SEI) refers to a variety of mechanisms by which students evaluate the teaching effectiveness of instructors in the classroom. The most common method is a student opinion survey administered in the latter part of course. Some departments (thirteen of the twenty-eight) have developed their own departmental questionnaires. Other departments use the IDEA form. The use of the IDEA instrument is required for all classes every odd spring (i.e. 2007, 2009, 2011). During those semesters, some departments administer a departmentally-based instrument as well. In other regular and summer semesters, some classes are evaluated using IDEA (roughly 1/3 of them). SIR II and CIES, two other nationally-normed instruments, can be used by departments, with the rest using departmental-based instruments. Guidelines that have been utilized for SEI at Southeast can be found at <http://cstl.semo.edu/cstl/idea/StudentEvalGuidelines.pdf>.

There are two main uses for such SEI results. The primary purpose of these surveys is to assist professors in gauging the effectiveness of their instruction and in identifying potential areas for improvement. Secondly, results are used by others to evaluate the teaching effectiveness of the instructor. This may include comparisons of faculty, use in personnel decisions, or even comparisons with other institutions. At Southeast Missouri State University, SEI results are used by faculty, but are also used in the tenure and promotion and merit evaluation processes as well as for generating departmental Key Performance Indicator data, and for national level comparisons of the institution.

Using the same instrument and results for these multiple purposes is problematic. As subjective opinion surveys, SEI are subject to influence by outside factors. Instructors can affect results (Feldman, 1979). A number of extraneous variables have also been found to affect student ratings of instruction, including size of the class, class length, time of day, whether the class is held in the evening, and the class level of the students (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, or graduate). Little is currently known as to how ITV classes and online classes affect student ratings (for a review, see Wachtel, 1998). There are also a number of controversies concerning the appropriate statistics to be applied to rating scales that adds to these concerns.

There are a number of other concerns related to interpretation. For example, a major issue in the use of student ratings in the evaluation of instruction is the fact that ratings are based on perceptions, and students might not be qualified to make some of the judgments required of them. For example, they are not in a position to evaluate whether course coverage is appropriate, as they might not yet have an overview of the field. It is well documented that the grade the student thinks he/she will receive affects their ratings. The interpretation of that finding is not entirely clear. It is possible that the instructor receives higher ratings because students are pleased with an easy grader. On the other hand, an instructor might receive higher ratings because the students are actively engaged and are learning more and performing better, resulting in higher grades. Both possibilities undoubtedly occur, thus making it difficult to interpret ratings as they relate to expected grades. There is considerable research related to these factors, including research conducted by the IDEA Center.

An important consideration for instructors is how the results of SEI will be used. When the results will be used for promotion, tenure, merit or a personnel decision, faculty may focus on affecting results of SEI for that purpose and not on the actual improvement of teaching. While SEI can provide one piece of evidence for teaching effectiveness, they do not and should not provide the only evidence. The IDEA Center recommends that SEI be used as no more than 25-35% of evaluation of instructor teaching effectiveness. As the IDEA Center urges, emphasis should be placed on other methods of evaluating the teaching of faculty regardless of the use of SEI (see suggestions on other methods in the following proposal).

Southeast uses the same SEI results for multiple purposes. In order to separate out these purposes and maximize the usefulness of the data for improvement of teaching, we propose a new approach. In this proposal, the university would continue to compare our teaching effectiveness against national data. It would allow supervisors to assess strengths and weaknesses of instructors that individual evaluations provide. It will allow faculty to use SEI results to support effective teaching for promotion and merit. Most important, it will encourage and motivate faculty to use SEI to examine and respond to results related to their teaching effectiveness in the classroom.

### **Proposal:**

- 1) The university will continue to administer IDEA every 2 years as under current policy.
- 2) Additionally, the university will continue to use summary report results for overall comparisons of teaching effectiveness, including national comparisons.
- 3) The faculty will continue to use departmental instruments, IDEA, or other nationally normalized instruments such as CIEQ or SIR II in other semesters.
- 4) The individual faculty class level results will continue to be used by department chairs to evaluate strengths and weakness of individual faculty members, in order to identify potential instructional issues and work with faculty on necessary actions that might improve their teaching.
- 5) Individual instructors will continue to examine teaching performance using SEI results and respond to them as necessary. Guidelines for the administration of SEI, maintaining confidentiality, and interpreting them are provided at the website <http://cstl.semo.edu/cstl/idea/StudentEvalGuidelines.pdf> and generally will be useful to faculty and chairs in this process.
- 6) However, the reporting of SEI data in promotion, tenure, and merit dossiers or records of service will not be required. Instead, instructors would report their response to the SEI results, as described below. Some faculty might want to continue to submit scores in addition to the required response narrative, and this should be allowed. The emphasis, however, is on how the faculty member used SEI data to improve teaching.

Faculty would administer SEI and the results would be returned to them. They would then describe their responses to the results. Regardless of the scores, a faculty member can respond to what they learned. They could describe changes they have made or will make or new innovations they have made or will implement. They could describe how more recent results reflect a previous change in teaching activities. They could reflect on what the results reveal or confirm. They could explain the assistance they sought from their colleagues, CSTL, and professional organizations. In the case where SEI results are positive or improved, they may discuss why that is the case. The narrative thus developed would be reflective and explain how the faculty member used the results in a positive manner to improve teaching.

This narrative would be included in the record of service as evidence of the implementation and response to SEI. At this level the SEI are supposed to provide feedback *to* help instructors examine their teaching effectiveness and make improvements. Reporting the response to the SEI rather than the actual results is more in line with the intent of the SEI at the individual faculty level. It would allow faculty *to* avoid focusing on maximizing numbers, but rather concentrate on an explanation of their response to the numbers.

When developing recommendations or making decisions on faculty teaching effectiveness, committees and individuals must take into account other activities presented by the faculty member consistent with accomplishment in teaching effectiveness including, but not limited to:

- peer evaluations
- portfolios,
- course improvement activities,
- curriculum improvement activities,
- team teaching activities
- faculty self-evaluation statement concerning philosophy and teaching techniques
- pre-test/post-test measures designed to assess gains in student knowledge
- other “value-added” outcomes measures
- documented informal or formal mid-semester student evaluations of instruction accompanied by reflections thereon
- other measures of effectiveness prescribed by departmentally-approved criteria.

While this new process is designed to supplant the use of scores and in fact would be considered the desired and recommended mechanism for using SEI data, it is expected that some faculty would want to continue to submit scores in addition to the required response narrative in their record of service. However, the lack of scores may not be used to infer poor teaching, or otherwise raise a red flag. Faculty with high scores may choose to submit their responses to the SEI data rather than the raw data. There would need to be a phase in period and this will also lead to a mixture of records of service with and without SEI data in them. Again, no inferences should be made from presence or absence of such data. As long as the narrative response to the SEI data is present, the faculty member has submitted evidence of teaching effectiveness as it relates to SEI, and to interpret any lack of scores as an indication of inferior or inadequate teaching effectiveness is inappropriate.

We believe that this approach to inclusion of SEI in the tenure, promotion, and merit process allows the multi-uses of SEI data and preserves the true intent of SEI as mechanisms for faculty to examine teaching effectiveness in the classroom without risk of misunderstanding, misinterpretation or misuse of the SEI data during the Tenure/Promotion and Merit evaluation processes.